

A Guide to Understanding and Using The North Dakota State Assessment Student Reports

Parents and teachers share a common goal in supporting the learning of every child. The North Dakota State Assessment Student Reports provide an important tool to parents and teachers in better understanding each student's level of achievement, in terms of the state's challenging academic content standards. This guide answers many questions parents and teachers might have about the design, administration, and reporting of this year's North Dakota State Assessments.

PROBLEM SOLVING

a) How can parents use the score reports to help their children? What type of skills and work are in each category and what resources are available for the categories?

- The test results will include a breakdown of your child's performance in categories within each subject. This will help you understand where your child needs additional practice or to be challenged by going deeper into a subject. You can use these results to locate activities online that were designed specifically for every grade level. You can also use the test results to guide a discussion with your child's teacher(s) about additional supports or challenges that may be needed in class, as well as other ways to support your child at home.
- To find resources in every category and at every grade level, visit www.bealearninghero.org or www.greatschools.org/gk/. You can use your child's individual score to find resources that will match his or her areas of strength and areas for improvement.

b) What does a child need to do to reach Level 3?

- To reach a Level 3, students need to understand and demonstrate that they have met the learning expectations for their grade level as outlined in the new, higher standards adopted by your state. Students do not need to cram or study for this test, because test questions reflect what they are learning and doing in the classroom every day. So the best preparation and practice is through the classwork and homework they complete throughout the year.

c) Why does this test matter for my child?

- The Smarter Balanced test helps parents understand how their child is progressing in math and English language arts/literacy (ELA) and how he or she is performing in comparison to peers in their grade level and school. It also informs parents where their child needs more support or additional challenges, which allows for more personalized instruction. For high school students, more than 200 colleges and universities in seven states have agreed to use Smarter Balanced scores to determine course placement. To learn more, visit <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/higher-education/>.

ABOUT INDIVIDUAL STUDENT SCORES

a) What if my child is doing well in the classroom and on his or her report card, but it is not reflected in the test score?

- Smarter Balanced is only one of several measures that illustrate a child's progress in math and ELA. Report card grades can include multiple sources of information like participation, work habits, group projects, homework, etc., that are not reflected in the Smarter Balanced score test, so there may be a discrepancy.

b) How can teachers help students improve and make progress on next year's test?

- Teachers can use the Smarter Balanced Digital Library, an online toolkit of instructional materials and classroom activities. These tasks can be completed throughout the year and give teachers opportunities to informally assess student understanding and provide immediate feedback to move learning forward. This process provides plenty of time to re-teach concepts and challenge students by extending and deepening learning.
- Teachers can use the information in the score reports to guide instruction. Students' scores in the math and English language arts/literacy categories provide information about what additional evidence a teacher should gather in the classroom to make decisions about next steps for teaching and learning.

c) From the score report, is it possible to identify where a student excels and where he or she needs more support and practice?

- On your child's score report, the scores in math and English language arts/literacy are broken down into categories. Your child's score in each will help you understand the progress your child is making and whether he/she needs additional practice or needs to be challenged by going deeper into a subject.
- The math test is broken down into:
 - Concepts and procedures
 - Problem solving and modeling/data analysis
 - Communicating reasoning
- The English language arts/literacy test is broken down into:
 - Reading
 - Writing
 - Listening
 - Research and Inquiry

d) How long will it be before progress is evident in student scores?

- As teachers spend more time focusing on the content outlined in the new standards and students gain more practice with the skills, the scores are expected to improve, especially for younger students. Several states have been using tests aligned to the higher standards and have seen dramatic improvements in student achievement.

e) What does it mean if a student did not achieve a Level 3? Should students be promoted to the next grade level if they do not achieve Level 3?

- Students who score at Level 3 or above in English language arts/literacy or math have met the standard of the grade level in the subject matter. If your child scored at Level 2, he or she may need additional support to meet the standard in that

subject this school year. Students scoring in Level 1 did not meet the standard and will require substantial support to grasp the skills and concepts this school year. If a child scored below Level 3, it does not mean that he or she should not have been promoted. These tests are only one of several measures of how well a student is progressing against the standards, and they do not determine promotion or report card grades.

f) Why are parents receiving test scores after the end of the school year?

- The Smarter Balanced tests are given on a computer, which speeds up the scoring of some sections, but there are also written sections of the test that must be hand-scored. Going beyond questions that can easily be scored by a computer is necessary to measure critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills. How quickly parent reports are available will vary between districts and states. Smarter Balanced's goal is to have scores available to teachers at the beginning of the school year so they have an understanding of each student's strengths and weaknesses and can better personalize instruction.

g) What if my child has special needs? How does the test account for that?

- The Smarter Balanced tests can be taken by all students, except those with severe cognitive disabilities. The test has accommodations and supports that are built into the test for students with an Individualized Education Plans (IEP) or 504 plans. Accommodations include digital scratch paper, Braille, closed captioning, and others.

SCORING

a.) Why do the scores look different than scores from previous state tests?

- The bar has been raised for students and the new tests are measuring more complex skills including critical-thinking, persuasive writing, and problem-solving, which is different than previous tests. A low score does not mean that your child did not improve or learned less. This first year's scores set a new baseline from which progress will be measured moving forward.

b.) How will students' scores be used?

Scores are used to identify where a child excels and can be challenged to go deeper into the subject matter, or where he or she needs extra support or practice. In some states, colleges and universities use the Grade 11 tests, typically in combination with Grade 12 grades in particular courses, as evidence of whether admitted students are ready for credit-bearing college-level work.

c.) What types of questions were asked?

- The Smarter Balanced test includes performance tasks, multi-step assignments that ask students to apply their knowledge and skills to address real-world problems. In English language arts/literacy, students have to apply their research and writing skills, and in math, they will solve a complex problem and then describe and defend their reasoning.
- The test also includes traditional multiple choice questions, as well as interactive questions that require students to drag and drop their answers into a box, create equations, and fill in the answer. The questions on the test emphasize the real-

world skills that are guiding instruction in the classroom: critical-thinking, writing, problem-solving, etc.

- To see a practice test for your child's grade, visit <http://sbac.portal.airast.org/practice-test/>
- The Smarter Balanced test is computer-adaptive. The questions adjust to a student's learning level, by giving harder or easier questions based on how well he or she is doing. This is more interactive and less frustrating for students because they are appropriately challenged throughout the test. It also provides more accurate results, especially for advanced and struggling students.

d.) How many questions were there in each subject? Is it possible to know how many questions a student answered correctly?

- Smarter Balanced consists of roughly 35 questions in math and approximately 40 questions in English language arts/literacy, plus performance tasks, which is comparable to previous tests. Since the test is computer adaptive, there is not an exact number of questions; students may get different types and numbers of questions.
- The score report does not indicate how many questions a student answered correctly. The scoring doesn't rely only on the number of correct answers, but the difficulty of each question. If a student does not answer a question, he or she will get the lowest possible score for that question. Questions are scored on a scale and students can earn partial credit. To watch a video that explains the Smarter Balanced test and walks through practice tests in math and English language arts/literacy, visit: <http://bealearninghero.org/classroom/smarter-balanced/>

e.) How were the questions scored? Who scored them?

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS/LITERACY:

- For the performance tasks, teams of educators from Smarter Balanced states reviewed and agreed upon student responses to serve as samples or anchors. Anchors are concrete examples of student writing in each of the score ranges. They serve as a reference point to ensure that scorers interpret and apply the scoring guides consistently. Scorers who have been trained to use the Smarter Balanced anchors and rubrics then score the individual student responses.
- The ELA performance tasks are scored in three areas:

Scoring Area	Score Range
Organization/purpose	0-4
Evidence/elaboration	0-4
Conventions	0-2

- Short answer and research responses were also scored with anchors that were verified by teachers. Each question has 2 points possible for answering the question and providing an explanation using evidence from the text. They are scored in three areas: Introduction, conclusion, or elaboration/evidence.
- Below is an example of a third grade anchor for a performance task:

Furry Heroes

Grade 3 ELA Full-Write Response from 2013 Smarter Balanced Pilot Test

Response

Me and my pet trtal silver like to save sea creachers. One day we were swimming then... **BOOM!!!!!!!!!!** We went to see what happend. A Squid and a Shark was fihting! We tried to calm them down but they wouldnt stop. So I picked up my phon then I waiter and waited. Then when I looked out the window I sawe them coming. Its the sea patrol. we all gave them some medason to calm them down. Then when we got home, a mearical hapened silver laed some eggs! I named them spick,fang, and sheller. That was some advencher.

SCORE POINT

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The organization of the narrative is somewhat sustained. There is a discernible plot (the narrator and a pet turtle help a squid and a shark). The setting is minimally maintained (the sea), and the narrator and characters are minimally developed (*Me and my pet trtal silver like to save sea creachers*). There is little variety in the use of transitional strategies (*Then when I looked... Then when we got home*). Gaps in the narrative lead to an uneven sequence of events (the narrative jumps from giving the squid and shark medicine, to the narrator being at home and Silver laying eggs.) The opening (*Me and my pet trtal silver like to save sea creachers*) and closure (*That was some advencher*) are adequate.

- For additional examples of anchors, visit:
<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Smarter-Balanced-Scoring-Guide-for-ELA-Full-Writes.pdf>

MATH:

- The open-ended math questions were also hand scored with anchors that were reviewed and agreed upon by educators. The general scale for the math questions is 0 to 2, although some more complex questions are scored on a different point scale. Scores can range from 0 to 4 possible points, depending on the question and grade level, with a 0 being “merely an acquaintance with the topic” to a 4 being a “full and complete understanding of the topic.”
- For the math test, the total score was calculated from the different categories:

Category	Weight
Concepts and procedures	50%
Communicating reasoning	25%
Problem solving, modeling and data analysis	25%

- f.) If a student was not familiar with computers, were accommodations made for technology, such as paper and pencil versions? Did students have enough time to finish?

- The test has no time limit so students who might be less adept at using a computer will have the necessary time they need to finish their work. Also, the test includes resources to address visual, auditory, and physical access barriers, allowing virtually all students to demonstrate what they know and can do.
- Paper tests are only available for schools that do not meet the technology requirement, and either lack computers or sufficient internet connections to support an online test. They are not an available option based on student preference. Students with a disability who need a paper test must have it listed as an accommodation on an IEP or 504.
- There were also resources available for students to practice on computers in class. This included taking Smarter Balanced practice tests, so they had the opportunity to become familiar with the tools, including calculators and highlighters, and the different types of questions, like creating a graph, typing answers in a box, etc. To see a practice test, visit <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/practice-test/>.
- There are also training tests that were available. It takes about an hour to run through the Training Items, a set of items that covers every problem type on the test and guides students through the use of the computer based tools like dragging and dropping, drawing lines on a graph and creating equations with the equation editor, so that students are familiar with them when they take the exam. To see the training test, visit <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/practice-test/>.

g.) How was student performance for the categories in each subject determined? Are sample questions in each category available in each grade level?

- The student's score in each category is based upon how well they performed on questions that required them to use skills in the category. A single question could fall into more than one category if it required using skills in more than one category.

h.) Is it possible to identify whether students finished every section of the test?

- Unfortunately this is not part of the score report. If a student does not answer a question, he or she will get the lowest possible score. However, it's not the number of questions answered correctly that determines the score, but the difficulty of the question. Because Smarter Balanced is adaptive, each student may get a different question. Any questions that have been left unanswered were not due to a time constraint, but rather that a student simply did not provide an answer.

i.) Do teachers receive the same kind of information as parents? If not, what do teachers receive?

- Smarter Balanced provides the same information to teachers and parents. Some states and districts may offer supplementary materials to educators.

REINFORCING THE CHANGES

a) Why do we need a new test and standards?

- A new test was needed to measure the new, more rigorous standards that are guiding teachers' instruction in the classroom in ELA and math. These standards focus on the skills students need in the real world, like critical thinking, analyzing, and problem-solving. The tests reflect the types of activities that students do in the classroom every day.

b) If fewer students are meeting the standards on this test than the previous state test, are they really accurate measures of student progress?

- Yes. Education leaders in our state expected fewer students to meet the standards because they are new. We have raised the bar and set higher expectations at each grade level. The new standards focus on more complex skills, and the tests are measuring these skills.

c) If scores from the Smarter Balanced test cannot be compared to previous test scores, why are these scores important?

- The scores on these tests are important because they show how well students are progressing against the new, higher standards. It is important for parents to know that their child is mastering the necessary skills to be successful in the next grade level.